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SUBJECT: HAMAS CONSIDERS A NEW MODUS VIVENDI WITH PA

CLASSIFIED BY POL/C, JOHN SCOTT, REASONS 1.5 (B/D)

SUMMARY AND COMMENT:

¶1. (C) IN THE AFTERMATH OF WIDE-SCALE ARRESTS OF HAMAS ACTIVISTS FOLLOWING THE OCTOBER 29 GUSH KATIF SUICIDE BOMBINGS, SOME OF OUR GAZA CONTACTS ARE STATING THAT HAMAS IS PREPARING TO ENTER INTO A LIMITED "TRUCE" WITH THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY (PA). THE TRUCE WOULD APPLY ONLY TO ATTACKS LAUNCHED FROM OR ON PA TERRITORY BUT WOULD SUPPOSEDLY ALSO BIND HAMAS LEADERSHIP TO "PERSUADING" HAMAS FUGITIVES TO TURN THEMSELVES IN UNDER GUARANTEES OF SAFETY. OTHER CONTACTS POINT OUT THAT HAMAS HAS ENTERED INTO SUCH AGREEMENTS IN THE PAST AND DISCOUNT THE EITHER THE POSSIBILITY OR THE EFFICIACY OF A NEW AGREEMENT. THEY ARGUE THAT EVEN IF THE LOCAL HAMAS LEADERSHIP IS INTERESTED IN REACHING A NEW MODUS VIVENDI WITH THE PA, THE OUTSIDE LEADERSHIP REMAINS INTENT ON KEEPING HAMAS' RADICAL EDGE. THE OUTSIDE LEADERSHIP, THEY CLAIM RETAINS THE ABILITY TO ORDER TERRORIST OPERATIONS INSIDE OF ISRAEL AND THE PA-CONTROLLED AREAS PRIMARILY THROUGH ITS CONTROL OF SIGNIFICANT HAMAS FINANCIAL RESOURCES. SIMILARLY, OUR CONTACTS APPEAR TO BE DIVIDED OVER THE LONG-TERM AFFECTS OF THE RECENT ARRESTS. SOME HAVE ARGUED THAT THE ARRESTS, WHICH MAY NUMBERED IN THE HUNDREDS, FAILED TO INCLUDE MEMBERS OF THE SO-CALLED "MILITARY NING" AND HAD A NEGLECTABLE IMPACT OF HAMAS OPERATIONS. OTHERS CLAIM THAT HAMAS IS NOW IN A STATE OF INTERNAL CRISIS ARISING FROM A LACK OF COORDINATION BETWEEN THE TWO WINGS BECAUSE OF PA AND GOI PRESSURE, INCLUDING THE MOST RECENT ARRESTS, AND ARGUE THAT AS A RESULT OF THE PRESSURE, HAMAS WILL HAVE LITTLE OPTION BUT TO RESPOND "MILITARILY."

¶2. (C) PUBLIC REACTION TO THE ARRESTS AND TO CONTINUED PA SECURITY FORCE ACTIVITIES AIMED AT HAMAS IS GENERALLY NEGATIVE. PUBLIC ANGER APPEARS TO BE LESS A RESULT OF ACTUAL SUPPORT FOR HAMAS THEN OF RESENTMENT AT ARAFAT'S PERCEIVED WILLINGNESS TO ATTACK HAMAS IN ORDER TO PLEASE THE U.S. AND ISRAEL. BUT HAMAS' ABILITY TO CAPITALIZE ON THE RESENTMENT APPEARS FOR NOW TO BE LIMITED BY THEIR OWN FAILURE TO IDENTIFY A CLEAR AND VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO ARAFAT'S PRESENT COURSE. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

¶3. (C) ACCORDING TO PALESTINIAN MEDIA AND HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS, PA SECURITY FORCES ARE CONTINUING TO SUMMON SUSPECTED ISLAMIST ACTIVISTS AND TO SEARCH THEIR HOMES. BUT POLICE ACTIVITIES APPEAR TO BE LOSING THEIR INTENSITY AND A NUMBER OF LOWER LEVEL ACTIVISTS HAVE NOW ALSO BEEN RELEASED. THEIR NUMBERS ARE IN ADDITION TO THE RELEASE LAST WEEK OF ANOTHER FIVE PROMINENT HAMAS AND ISLAMIC JIHAD LEADERS. ACCORDING TO HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS, AT LEAST 160, AND PROBABLY AS MANY AS 200, SUSPECTED HAMAS ACTIVISTS REMAIN IMPRISONED. ACCORDING TO IMAD FALOUJI, THE ISLAMIST MINISTER OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS, THE RELEASES WILL CONTINUE.

A DEAL IS STRUCK?

¶4. (C) ACCORDING TO FALOUJI, THE PA IS ALSO CONSIDERING

LIFTING THE HOUSE ARREST IMPOSED UPON HAMAS SPIRITUAL LEADER SHEIKH AHMED YASIN IMPOSED AFTER THE GUSH KATIF BOMBING LAST OCTOBER. ENDING HIS STATE OF ARREST AS WELL AS CONTINUED RELEASE OF PRISONERS WOULD BE THE RESULT, ACCORDING TO FALOUJI, OF AN AGREEMENT REACHED BETWEEN PA AND HAMAS FOCUSED ON FOUR ISSUES: (1) HAMAS WILLINGNESS TO END ATTACKS FROM OR ON PA TERRITORY, (2) HAMAS "HELP" IN "PERSUADING" FUGITIVES, INCLUDING NOTORIOUS TERRORIST MOHAMMED DEIF, TO TURN THEMSELVES INTO THE PA UNDER A PROMISE OF "FAIR" TREATMENT (COMMENT: WE DOUBT DEIF WILL BE IMPRESSED BY THIS OFFER), (3) AN END TO ANTI-PA INCITEMENT, AND (4) A PA PROMISE THAT HAMAS WOULD BE ALLOWED TO CONTINUE ITS "POLITICAL" (VICE "MILITARY") WORK. TALK OF A "CEASEFIRE" HAS ALSO AROUSED CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION IN ISRAEL, ESPECIALLY CLAIMS BY ISRAELI DEFENSE FORCES CHIEF OF STAFF MOFAZ THAT SUCH A DEVELOPMENT WOULD BE "POSITIVE AND RIGHT." FALOUJI QUOTED PA CABINET SECRETARY TAYYIB ABDUL RAHIM, WHO HANDLES RELATIONS WITH HAMAS FOR ARAFAT, AS SAYING THAT HAMAS HAD AGREED TO THESE CONDITIONS IN A MEETING HELD EARLIER THIS WEEK.

¶5. (C) BUT OTHERS ARE NOT SO SURE. AN AMERICAN REPORTER WHO RECENTLY INTERVIEWED HAMAS ACTIVIST ISMAEL ABU SHANAB TOLD POLOFF THAT ABU SHANAB HAD DISCUSSED WITH HIM HAMAS' ABILITY TO "TERRORIZE" ISRAEL WITH A HANDFUL OF ACTIVISTS. ABU SHANAB, RELEASED FROM PRISON SHORTLY AFTER HIS ARREST, EXPRESSED NO REMORSE ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE GUSH KATIF BOMBINGS ON HAMAS-PA RELATIONS. SIMILARLY, GAZA REUTERS BUREAU CHIEF NIDAL AL-MOGHRABI TOLD POLOFF ON NOVEMBER 18 THAT HAMAS ACTIVISTS HAD REPORTED NO PROGRESS FROM THE SAME MEETING BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND TAYYIB ABDUL RAHIM THAT FALOUJI CLAIMED PRODUCED AN AGREEMENT. AL-MOGHRABI NOTED THAT HAMAS HAD REACHED SIMILAR AGREEMENTS WITH THE PA IN THE PAST, ONLY TO BREACH THEM WHEN AN ATTACK SUITED THEIR INTERESTS.

WHOM DID THEY ARREST AND WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

¶6. (C) CONTROVERSY CONTINUES LIKEWISE ON THE QUESTION OF WHOM THE PA MANAGED TO ARREST AND WHAT THE IMPACT OF THE ARRESTS WAS ON HAMAS' ABILITY TO OPERATE. A SENIOR SECURITY ANALYST FOR TITULAR PA SECURITY HEAD MG NASSIR YUSUF ADMITTED TO POLOFF THAT THE ARRESTS, WHILE BROAD, HAD NETTED NO ONE FROM THE MILITARY WING. SIMILAR VIEWS WERE OFFERED BY NASSIR YUSUF HIMSELF, BY FALOUJI, BY FATAH CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEMBER HANI AL-HASSAN, AND BY THE EDITOR OF THE ISLAMIST WEEKLY, "AL-RESALLAH," GHAZI HAMAD. AL-HASSAN REPORTED THAT THE DEATHS OF IMAD AWADALLAH AND OTHERS FROM THE MILITARY WING HAD INDEED DISRUPTED "POLITICAL" CONTROL OVER THE UNDERGROUND CELLS FOR A FEW WEEKS, BUT HE BELIEVED THAT SUCH CONTROL HAD NOW BEEN REESTABLISHED.

¶7. (C) ON THE QUESTION OF TIES BETWEEN HAMAS' POLITICAL AND MILITARY WINGS, OUR CONTACTS DIVIDED SHARPLY. GHAZI HAMAD, EDITOR OF THE ISLAMIST "AL-RESELLAH," SAID THAT RELATIONS WERE "IN CRISIS" AS A RESULT OF RECENT ARRESTS AND THE APPARENT LOSS OF INFLUENCE BY THE MORE "PRAGMATIC," INSIDE LEADERSHIP. HAMAD ARGUED THAT THE ARRESTS, WHILE RANDOM (ALTHOUGH WANTED, HAMAD AVOIDED ARREST SIMPLY BY STAYING AT A FRIEND'S HOUSE AND AVOIDING HIS OFFICE FOR A FEW DAYS), WAS COMPELLING HAMAS TO SHOW THAT IT COULD STILL RESPOND. HAMAD ARGUED THAT THE GUSH KATIF ATTACK WAS AN EXAMPLE OF THE LOSS OF POLITICAL CONTROL OVER THE MILITARY WING -- YASIN HAD BEEN DEEPLY TROUBLED BY THE ATTACK AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR HIS FUTURE ABILITY TO COME TO A MORE VIABLE MODUS VIVENDI (FROM HAMAS' STANDPOINT) WITH THE PA.

¶8. (C) FALOUJI CAST THE PROBLEM IN DIFFERENT TERMS. HE TOLD US THAT YASIN'S OBJECTIONS TO THE GUSH KATIF ATTACK WERE NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF THEIR ABILITY TO WRECK HAVOC WITH HIS ATTEMPTS TO IMPROVE TIES WITH THE PA, BUT BECAUSE THEY SHOWED THAT THE OUTSIDE LEADERSHIP WAS IN A POSITION TO ORDER ATTACKS WITHOUT HIS SPECIFIC

APPROVAL. BUT WHILE THERE WERE DISAGREEMENTS, FALOUJI SAID THERE WAS NO QUESTION OF A BREAKDOWN IN COMMUNICATIONS WITHIN HAMAS OR A CRISIS (AS HAMAD CLAIMED) IN THE HAMAS LEADERSHIP.

ENDING YASIN'S HOUSE ARREST

¶ 9. (C) AL-HASSAN ALSO REPORTED THAT HE HAD MET YASIN RECENTLY AND HAD FOUND HIM TO BE IN "HIGH MORALE" AND OCCUPYING HIMSELF BY READING ISLAMIC HISTORY. THE WHEELCHAIR-BOUND YASIN POSSESSES ONLY A "BRAIN, IDEOLOGY, AND WILL," ACCORDING TO AL-HASSAN, AND HAS LITTLE ELSE TO LIVE FOR OTHER THAN HIS "CAUSE." BUT AL-HASSAN WARNED THAT THE PROLONGED HOUSE ARREST OF AL-HASSAN WAS PROVING TO BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE. WITHOUT YASIN AND WITH MOST OF THE LOCAL LEADERSHIP IN AND OUT OF PA PRISONS OR OTHERWISE "MARGINALIZED," ACCORDING TO AL-HASSAN, HAMAS' OUTSIDE LEADERSHIP WAS BECOMING MORE PROMINENT. AL-HASSAN REPORTED THAT YASIN TOLD HIM DURING THEIR MEETING THAT HE WAS "NOT RESPONSIBLE" FOR ANY FUTURE HAMAS ATTACKS, IMPLYING THAT HE COULD NOT BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR ATTACKS ORDERED FROM THE OUTSIDE. AL-HASSAN SAID HE WAS URGING ARAFAT TO END YASIN'S ISOLATION, IF ONLY TO REASSERT THE POWER OF THE LOCAL LEADERSHIP. FALOUJI ALSO SAID THAT HE WAS PUSHING ARAFAT TO RELEASE YASIN FROM HIS HOUSE ARREST AND HOPED FOR RESULTS "VERY SHORTLY."

DEALING WITH HAMAS

¶ 10. (C) AL-HASSAN OFFERED A SIMILAR ASSESSMENT OF THE WYE AGREEMENT TO THAT FOUND IN A HAMAS MEMORANDUM ON THE SAME SUBJECT. THE WYE PLANTATION MEMORANDUM WAS BASICALLY A "SECURITY MEMORANDUM" RATHER THAN A POLITICAL DEAL. (COMMENT: THIS VIEW IS WIDESPREAD IN GAZA.) HE EMPHASIZED THAT HAMAS WAS A POLITICAL PROBLEM AND COULD NOT BE SOLVED BY PURELY SECURITY-RELATED MEANS. A PROBLEM, HE NOTED, THAT IRONICALLY PLAGUED HAMAS ITSELF WHICH ALSO SOUGHT TO IMPOSE A "MILITARY" SOLUTION ON THE POLITICAL PROBLEM OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE. AL-HASSAN DESCRIBED YASIN AS TAKING A LONG-TERM VIEW OF HIS SITUATION. "THESE MEN THINK IN TERMS OF 25 YEARS, NOT A FEW WEEKS. THEY HAVE NO EXPECTATIONS FOR TOMORROW," AL-HASSAN COMMENTED. AT THE SAME TIME, HE NOTED THAT PA OFFERS OF A TRUCE TO HAMAS WOULD LIKELY BE REJECTED. THE PA HAD CONVINCED HAMAS NOT TO TAKE "MILITARY" ACTIONS IN THE PAST, BUT HAD SUFFERED GRIEVOUS LOSSES, INCLUDING MUHI AL-DIN AL-SHERIFI, THE AWADALLAH BROTHERS, AND OTHERS. AL-HASSAN CONCLUDED THAT THE PA HAD MISSED OPPORTUNITIES IN THE PAST TO DESTROY HAMAS (HE DID NOT SPECIFY WHAT THESE OPPORTUNITIES WERE). THE SOLUTION NOW WAS TO ISOLATE HAMAS POLITICALLY BY MAKING PROGRESS IN THE PEACE PROCESS.

¶ 11. (C) FALOUJI ALSO SAID HE WOULD PUSH ARAFAT TO END YASIN'S HOUSE ARREST. BASING HIS COMMENTS ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT HAMAS HAS IN FACT OFFERED A "CEASEFIRE" (AN ASSUMPTION OTHERS HAVE CHALLENGED, SEE PARA 5), FALOUJI CLAIMS THAT THE PA MUST NOW SHOW ITS WILLINGNESS TO MEET HAMAS HALF-WAY BY RELEASING MORE PRISONERS AND ENDING YASIN'S HOUSE-ARREST. TO DO OTHERWISE, FALOUJI CLAIMED, WOULD BE TO OPEN THE DOOR FURTHER TO HAMAS' OUTSIDE LEADERSHIP, WHICH, AS ARGUED AL-HASSAN, WAS GAINING GROUND AT YASIN'S EXPENSE THROUGH ITS CONTROL OF HAMAS FINANCES. FALOUJI WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE PA WAS WEIGHING AN OFFER FOR HAMAS PARTICIPATION IN SOME CABINET DELIBERATIONS RESPONSIBLE FOR FORMULATING THE PA POSITION AND PLANS FOR THE POSSIBLE DECLARATION OF A PALESTINIAN STATE NEXT MAY. IN AN ASIDE, FALOUJI COMMENTED THAT HAMAS WOULD MOVE PART OF ITS JORDANIAN LEADERSHIP TO SYRIA. FALOUJI SAID THAT MUSA ABU MARZOUK AND KHALID MESHAL WOULD REMAIN IN JORDAN, AS THEY CARRY JORDANIAN CITIZENSHIP. MOHAMMED NAZZAR AND OTHERS WOULD LEAD THE MOVE TO DAMASCUS. (COMMENT: WE HAVE SEEN NUMEROUS REPORTS OF A HAMAS MOVE TO DAMASCUS BEFORE. SO FAR, NO MOVE.)

COMMENT:

¶12. (C) THROUGH THE GUSH KATIF ATTACK (WE EXCLUDE THE LATER JERUSALEM BOMBING FOR WHICH ISLAMIC JIHAD CLAIMED RESPONSIBILITY) AND SUBSEQUENT CRACKDOWN, A RENEWED DEBATE OVER HAMAS AND THE FUTURE OF HAMAS - PA TIES IS TAKING PLACE IN GAZA. THIS DEBATE APPEARS TO REVOLVE AROUND AT LEAST TWO QUESTIONS THAT ADMIT NO EASY ANSWER: (1) WHO CALLS THE SHOTS IN HAMAS (THE INSIDERS VS. OUTSIDERS ISSUE) AND (2) WHETHER THE RECENT WAVE OF ARRESTS HAS DONE ANYTHING TO DISRUPT RELATIONS BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND POLITICAL WINGS OF HAMAS. AS IS APPARENT FROM THE FOREGOING, GAZANS THEMSELVES, INCLUDING ISLAMISTS, HAVE ARRIVED AT DIFFERENT ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS.

¶13. (C) FROM OUR CONVERSATIONS THERE DOES SEEM TO BE A GROWING CONCERN THAT HAMAS' OUTSIDE LEADERSHIP INCREASINGLY DESIRES TO BLOCK PA - HAMAS RAPPROCHEMENT. THIS IS PRESUMABLY BECAUSE AN UPTICK IN PA - HAMAS RELATIONS WOULD REDUCE OUTSIDE CONTROL OVER HAMAS BY GIVING THE LOCAL LEADERSHIP A COUNTER-WEIGHT TO THE OUTSIDE. THE DESIRE TO MAINTAIN BETTER TIES MIGHT ALSO PROVE TO BE A RATIONALE FOR SUSPENDING ONE OF HAMAS' MOST POTENT WEAPON: THE ABILITY TO MOUNT TERRORIST OPERATIONS. SUCH ARGUMENTS ARE PARTIALLY CONVINCING, BUT NOT TOTALLY SO GIVEN THAT VIRTUALLY ALL OF HAMAS' POLITICAL STRENGTH DERIVES FROM ITS POSITION INSIDE GAZA AND THE WEST BANK AND THUS CANNOT BE TOTALLY IGNORED BY ANY ASPECT OF ITS LEADERSHIP. HAMAS' ROLE IN THE PALESTINIAN DIASPORA IS MUCH WEAKER THAN, FOR EXAMPLE, FATAH'S. IT WOULD ALSO APPEAR THAT HAMAS WOULD LOSE A GREAT DEAL OF ITS POPULAR SUPPORT IF IT WERE TO LAUNCH AN ATTACK NOW, GIVEN THE LIKELIHOOD OF A RENEWED CLOSURE IMPOSED BY THE GOI.

¶14. (C) ON THE SECOND QUESTION CONCERNING THE EFFICIACY OF THE RECENT ARRESTS, MOST OF OUR CONTACTS (WITH THE EXCEPTION OF HAMAD), BELIEVED THAT THE EFFECT WAS NEGLIBLE. IF WE CAN BELIEVE AL-HASSAN'S STORY OF YASIN'S HIGH MORALE WHILE READING ISLAMIC HISTORY OR ABU SHANAB'S REMARKS TO THE AMERICAN REPORTER ENDORSING THE USE OF TERROR TO "CONTROL" ISRAEL, THERE SEEMS TO BE LITTLE QUESTION OF AN ORGANIZATION IN A DEEP CRISIS. SEEN FROM THIS PERSPECTIVE, THE PERENNIAL OUTSIDER/INSIDER QUESTION BECOMES ONE OF EMPHASIS RATHER THAN ONE WHICH DETERMINES HAMAS' OVERALL DIRECTION.

¶15. (C) AS A FINAL POINT, FALOUJI'S COMMENT THAT "HAMAS WILL NOT DISAPPEAR" SEEMS TO US RELEVANT. THE PA IS INCURRING SUBSTANTIAL PUBLIC ANGER BECAUSE OF ITS CRACKDOWN, LESS BECAUSE OF PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR HAMAS THAN BECAUSE THE CRACKDOWN IS PERCEIVED TO BE BOWING TO ISRAELI AND U.S. DICTATES. AT THE SAME TIME, THE PA PROBABLY REALIZES THAT THERE ARE LIMITS TO WHAT IT CAN DO AGAINST HAMAS FROM A PURELY SECURITY POINT OF VIEW, GIVEN HAMAS' DEEP-ROOTEDNESS IN SOCIETY AND GIVEN THE VIEW OF VIRTUALLY ALL GAZANS, INCLUDING FATAH STALWARTS, WHICH ACCEPTS HAMAS' RIGHT TO ENGAGE IN POLITICAL ACTIVITY OUTSIDE OF TERRORISM. YET IT IS PROBABLY ON THE POLITICAL LEVEL WHERE THE PA STANDS THE BEST CHANCE OF WINNING ITS STRUGGLE AGAINST HAMAS. FIRST, THE PA WILL CLEARLY BENEFIT FROM THE PRESENT UPSURGE IN THE PEACE PROCESS, EVEN IF THIS PROCESS BRINGS LESS THAN MOST PALESTINIANS BELIEVE THEY ARE ENTITLED TO. SECOND, HAMAS HAS FAILED TO DEFINE A CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVE TO ARAFAT'S COURSE OF ACTION. PA PRESSURE AGAINST HAMAS, ESPECIALLY IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF THE GUSH KATIF BOMBING, WAS ACCEPTED BY MOST GAZANS AND SERVED AS A USEFUL REMINDER TO ALL PALESTINIANS THAT HAMAS' TERRORIST ACTIONS THREATEN THE INTERESTS OF ALL PALESTINIANS. BUT PA EFFORTS AGAINST HAMAS TO BE CREDIBLE WITHIN PALESTINIAN SOCIETY, MUST CONTAIN A POLITICAL COMPONENT, AS AL-HASSAN SUGGESTED, AS WELL.

WALKER